Digital Marketing Institute

WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

Transcript

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Website Optimization

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LESSON 1: WEB DESIGN AND WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

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BUILD YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

A website should have a purpose. It should be designed to consider the actions that you want website visitors to take once they get to the site. You might want them to buy something from the site, fill in a contact form, or just browse the website content and learn about your company or brand.

When we talk about optimizing a website, we mean a site that provides a high-quality visitor experience, one that makes it easy for people to complete the actions that you want them to complete. This will generate more business for the company and higher satisfaction for the visitor. This is the case for both B2B and B2C organizations.

There are some free and easy ways you can create an online experience for your company or brand. You can use these to start building up your online profile without even having a website. You could try them out to see how things go before deciding to build a website or use them to enhance your existing website experience.

Here are some simple ways you can build your online presence. Get listed on Google Maps, as well as Apple and Bing maps. Create a social media profile for your business. Consider how mobile users view your site as more people are more likely to find your site through mobile than desktop.

If you are visible online through Google Maps and social media, it means that your company can engage directly with consumers and potential customers who are active online. These people might be searching from applications and phone numbers for services that they require or interacting with content and topics on social channels.

Both social media and map listings provide opportunities for you to take advantage of customer reviews and recommendations. It's hard to think of anything more powerful and persuasive than peer-to-peer recommendations as a way to attract new customers.

Starting on social media might seem daunting, but you can be selective about it. You don't have to appear on every single platform as it takes a lot of work to keep your social profile busy and keep you interacting effectively with your audience. But you should, at the very least, have a LinkedIn company page and a Facebook company page, as they allow you to include basic reviews and information like your location and so on.

You don't need to be on every social platform, and you should only set up Twitter and Instagram if you can dedicate the time and resources to keeping those updated on a very regular basis for long-term.

TikTok and Snapchat are good for B2C targeting of younger audiences.

Let's look at how to set up a Google Maps listing. Visit www.google.com/business. Enter your business details. Google will send out a postcard containing the code to verify the address you entered.

You go through a similar process for setting up a listing on Bing, which is worth doing as it's used by Amazon's Alexa. Go to bingplaces.com and under "Get Started" click on "New User." If your business is already listed, you can claim your listing or add a new one. Complete your listing profile and verify it by receiving a postcard from Bing or Google.

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Here's the steps for Apple Maps. Go to mapsconnect.apple.com. Sign in with your Apple ID or create one. Click on "My Small Business" from the menu and then verify your information. You can choose to receive a code by phone, which you then type into the Apple site. Once you've been approved, you'll be able to review and confirm your listing.

Whichever platform you decide to use, you should always check your map listings regularly, as there are features for continual engagement of customers like posts and updates. Pay particular attention to your contact details on all map listings when your business details change.

Here's a tip. Once you're up and running on Google Maps, ask your customers to write a good review for you. This way, when people are actively searching for your services, they will see positive reviews about your company. This can reassure new customers that you are the right choice for them.

Keep an eye on all of your reviews, both good and bad. You should be willing to reply to any negative reviews that are posted and deal with customer issues directly. Being proactive can impress people just as much as positive reviews.

Free web experiences, like map listings and social media profiles, are a good starting point for businesses. But when an organization wants to step it up to the next level, a website is essential.

Alongside your website, map listings and social media can enhance your digital presence.

WALKTHROUGH: SETTING UP A GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE

In order to get onto Google Maps and set up a business profile so you're searchable online, you can use Google Business Profiles that can complement your website and just allow you to start with having a website presence before building your own website or indeed, to complement your existing website.

So just do a Google search for "google business profile," and that will bring you to this page and we can start off from there. And we can begin by signing in or Managing Now. So, let's just click ahead, and we need to sign in. And from here, we can add our business to Google. So, we start off with our business name and our business category.

So, we just start typing in, and we enter in our category and go to Next. We need to tell Google if our customers can visit us in-store or at an office. So, depending on whether you have an in-store or office location, you can choose Yes or No. Where do you service your customers? And that is if you have a specific service area, if you're an electrician or you're a delivery organization, that you only work within a certain area.

It is optional, so you don't need to choose it if it doesn't apply to you. And then, where is your business base? And if you don't have a website, you can tick that and that will allow you to proceed without a website. And then we have to enter in our mailing address. And then we will get a postcard that contains a code sent out to us by Google to verify that this address is correct.

When the postcard arrives the code is on, you log back into Google Business Profile, you enter the code that's on your postcard that has arrived at your address, and then that verifies that this is the correct address that you have provided Google. And from there, you're able to build a business presence on Google. So, let's take a look.

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So, I'm just back in a Google Business Profile that I've already set up. So, on the left-hand side, we have this menu where I can add posts, I've got some information that I can add about my company, I can get insights about people looking for me, reviews and manage those reviews. So down here, we do have this, Get More Reviews function where you're able to share the review form with your existing customers and ask them to proactively review you on Google Maps because the more reviews you get on Google Maps, the better your company appears to people who are researching you.

You can also add other things like, you can add photos or product services, you can build a basic website and, you know, just make a presence for yourself online, on Google Maps to complement your existing website or indeed, allow you to get an online presence before you have a website actually built.

But to begin, it's good to set up a Google Business Profile just to get yourself out there, get yourself on Google Maps, be findable by people who want your services and use it as part of your long-term digital marketing strategy to complement any future or existing website with this map listing. So definitely worth setting up a Google Business Profile.

TYPES OF WEBSITE

Now that we've discussed free online experiences like maps and social profiles, we are going to look specifically at website optimization best practices as these are a level up from the free experiences. The topics covered apply to both new sites you're planning and to live sites that you already have up and running so you can get the best out of your website in relation to your business goals.

There are three main types of websites you can have: an eCommerce site, it allows companies to sell their products directly to website visitors online. Visitors can browse products on the site, read through benefits and features, and purchase items by paying online with a credit card or other payment method such as PayPal.

A lead generation site allows a company to collect contact details from people they might like to do business with. On this kind of site, visitors might read through content about the company such as a blog, an About page, or read reports to get a feel for the company, its products and services. The marketer's aim is for site visitors to enter their contact details into a web form on the site in return for something from the company. This is called a lead magnet, and it could be something like an eBook or watching a video.

The third is a portfolio site, sometimes called a brochure site. It is a relatively simple site that showcases the company's products and services. This type of site doesn't have conversion points like buying a product, downloading valuable content, or lead magnet, but visitors can learn about a company and its offering by reading through their product or service information. In terms of having your brand presence online, a nicely designed and informative portfolio site can be well worth doing.

Note, eCommerce websites can be used to generate leads and lead generation sites can lead people to purchase online. All websites have the basic function of educating people about the brand's products and services. However, some sites are exclusively eCommerce lead generation or portfolio, so it's important to understand how they operate.

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Let's look more closely at the three main website types, looking first at the goals common to them all. These include:

- increase total numbers of users to the website
- increase the average time spent on site
- provide a better website user experience, where a site visitor has an enjoyable reaction to using the website and feels comfortable and not frustrated
- encourage a higher number of return visits by people coming back on the website
- build positive brand affinity, ensuring people feel positive about the brand or company
- enhance customer experience also known as CX – this is going beyond the website experience and it refers to the overall feelings or perceptions a site visitor has about a company after interacting with the brand's website products or services. It is hoped that visitors who have a positive experience turn into valued customers.

Now let's go over the specific aims of the eCommerce site. These are, of course, people focused on spending money in purchasing something.

The goals of an eCommerce site are:

- to increase revenue, meaning the amount of money generated directly through online sales
- drive more transactions, which means increasing the visitors and numbers of sales on a website
- improve eCommerce conversion rate – this is the percentage of people who visit a site and then purchase. You can work out your eCommerce rate by dividing your total number of transactions by the total number of website users.
- increase the average order value or the AOV, meaning the average amount of money that someone spends when they purchase – this is calculated as revenue divided by sales.

The purpose of a lead generation site is different as it is focused less on monetary transactions and more on collecting contact details of website visitors.

The goals of a lead generation site are:

- to increase the number of leads the company has – this is the total number of contacts received both good and bad that are received directly through a website's contact options
- increase the number of qualified leads – this is a lead that meets a certain quality standard of who is worth getting a follow-up call from on your sales team.
- drive a higher lead conversion rate – this means the percentage of visitors who fill out a form and become a lead. You can then calculate your lead conversion rate by dividing your total number of leads by the total number of website users.
- improve lead close rate – this is the percentage of qualified leads who your sales team can then contact to sell to.
- increase lead quality by increasing the number of qualified leads by channel location and lead magnet type. This is where you drill down into the data to see which channel like search email or social media is driving the most quality leads. This also applies to which locations typically drive quality leads and which lead magnet generates the most valuable leads.

All of this is worth knowing so you can focus your efforts on your high impact channels, locations, and lead magnets, and so on.

WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION AND THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

As people visit a website at all different stages of the buyer's journey, you need to provide them the right experience and content that will help them move towards conversion. In other words, if someone is at the consideration stage, you need to provide them with an informative experience that will show them that your product is the solution to their needs.

We can look at some website functions that show up along the buyer journey that will be affected by website optimization.

Number one, the awareness stage. Here's where you can introduce your organization's value and some top-line benefits of your products or services.

Number two, the interest stage. Build on the initial benefit and drive a visitor's interest, curiosity, and intrigue about your company so they can start thinking about your brand, products, or services.

Number three, the consideration stage. This is where you can dive deeper into the information and education about your brand or product benefits and demonstrate your product or service as the solution to their needs.

Number four, the conversion stage is where you can make it simple and straightforward for them to take action on your site. So you can make sure you have an easy to use eCommerce checkout or straightforward content forms for lead collection and so on.

The retention stage, number five, is about having a good online experience, interesting content, and positive brand perceptions associated with your website. This will make it easier to get past visitors and encourage customers to return.

At any of these stages, it's important to make it easy for customers to find information quickly. When you work to optimize your website, you can actually improve the buyer journey. By improving the user experience on the website, you are also removing any potential roadblocks or friction that could cause a user not to complete an action you want them to take, like making a purchase or filling out a lead form.

Friction is a key concept. Friction is anything that makes it hard for a website visitor to complete an action like buying, completing a lead form, or browsing your content.

We always want to be mindful of reducing friction to help drive better digital performance. It's worth reviewing your website and taking notes of any friction points when looking to improve performance. Friction points might include a confusing site navigation, complicated forms or checkout process, unclear benefits to converting, or a slow website.

Why not look at your website and identify friction points on it? During your review, think where is it hard to complete a task? Take note of this and try to work out a way to simplify the experience.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A WEBSITE

As a marketer, you will probably not be designing and updating your website yourself. You would ideally work with website designers, programmers, and developers, or an agency to craft a website that is appealing to users and can be found through search engines.

In that case, some of the tasks you might be involved in when it comes to website optimization include writing and editing the website content, including calls-to-action, that encourage site visitors to engage with you. Collaborating on design layouts and sharing your experience in user engagement. Setting branding guidelines, including color, typography, and imagery. Ensuring all website analytics and tracking tools are set up correctly. Optimizing the site to follow best SEO practices. Analyzing and reporting on user engagement to help continually optimize the website performance. Remember, optimization is an ongoing process.

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Even if you are not directly building the site, it's very useful for you to know the fundamentals of design and best practice.

There are many different elements on a webpage that you can optimize to help guide visitors to take action. Let's look at some of these elements as we will be referring to these throughout the module.

The navigation is a menu of key website sections and pages. Good navigation allows people to use and move through your website. It can help drive positive user experiences and assist commercial activity by allowing visitors to easily find and engage with your content, products, or lead magnets. Good navigation makes your website usable and will help deliver on your business objectives.

Page title is the name given to the website which is picked up by search engine spiders for SEO. It should include your priority SEO keywords and your brand name.

Page headers are headings on a webpage to help the reader and search engines understand the different sections of that page. These should also include some SEO keywords.

Body copy or text refers to the words that are written on a web page that offer details about your products or services. They should be well written and intended to educate your audience and position your product or organization as the solution to their needs. Always consider keyword use when writing copy so your site can be picked up by search engines and organic searchers.

A call-to-action or CTA is a button on a web page that guides the visitor to take an action. Examples of CTAs are buttons that say contact us, buy now, add to cart, or submit details.

A hero image is a large banner image at the top of a website that engages website visitors visually and can be used to guide them towards clicking on CTAs.

Video, audio, and images, graphical elements placed on a page to make it more appealing and engaging to visitors. Video and audio content can also be used in an appealing and informative way and shared out on your social media.

A web form is a form that might appear on a contact or signup page, where website visitors can enter their name and contact details to share with your company. They might do this in return for access to content, like signing up for a newsletter or webinar, or simply getting in touch with a question.

All of these elements on a website should be carefully thought through and designed, and also monitored over time to ensure they're working as well as they can. You can use A/B testing to help ensure the best wording or placement or graphics that are being used. And we'll cover that some more later in the module.

MAIN PAGES OF A WEBSITE

The next thing to look at are the main pages on your website that attract visitors and see how you can go about optimizing them.

Start with the Homepage. This is like the front door to your website and is very often the first impression you give of yourself and your offerings. The homepage should entice users to click through to other pages on the site by providing them with just enough information that they want to explore deeper. They should be able to easily see any products or offers you're promoting, exciting news, or high-impact content. Keep in mind that visitors to your site don't always arrive first at the

homepage, as they may come in via landing pages, but it's important to always pay attention to your homepage and keeping it updated as visitors should be able to click on it anytime from anywhere in the site.

The About page is where you get to tell your visitors about your company, its history or story, and your brand values. You can use the content on this page to drive trust and start building a relationship with potential customers who share your vision or values and who are likely to react positively to your brand's story. It can be a nice touch to show your employees or founders or the executive team on this page, giving the company a more human side.

The Contact page is where visitors know they can get in touch with your company. This is usually done by listing one or several email addresses, a phone number, and an address or map location. Make this page clear and simple, ensuring the phone number is visible. Keep your contact form short and only ask for information that you actually need. Use a CAPTCHA to reduce spam or bot contact requests.

It's also a good idea to use Schema markup for your contact page and other website pages, so search engines can find and categorize this information much more easily. Your website developer could do that by using schema.org. This will allow them to add Schema to your website, which adds additional understanding for search engines as to the content of your pages.

Product category pages are the pages that show visitors the collections of products or services you offer. For example, if you're an electric goods retailer, you might have one category page for TVs and another one for all laptops. Organizing your categories of products or services within a grid is a nice easy way for people to understand, showing no more than four-items-wide on a desktop or two-items-wide for a mobile display.

At a level below the category pages are the individual product pages. Each of these give specific details about individual products or services that you offer. They would list product descriptions, prices, delivery charges, and an easy-to-understand call-to-action, CTA buttons like Add to Cart or Inquire Now, which encourage visitors to take action and convert.

Product images are important, so always use high-quality images that allow the visitor to zoom in and look at the product details. Provide plenty of information about product benefits and features, maybe include demonstration videos and list related products that might entice visitors to buy more from you.

The shopping cart is like a virtual cart where people can view the e-commerce items that they have added to the cart. On the shopping cart page, you should clearly list all the items that people have added and the quantity for each. The page should clearly indicate the total cost for the items and make sure to include any delivery charges in your totals. When the cost of delivery is added toward the end of the purchase journey, many people will abandon the purchase and you will lose the sale. So you really need to be clear early in the process what the delivery costs will be.

More complex e-commerce sites might include a wish list in addition to a shopping cart. The next step after the shopping cart is the checkout. This is the point where people decide to buy and they enter their name, address, and payment details to make the purchase.

Keep this section smooth and understandable. Do not ask for any information that you don't need, like age and gender, only request what's needed to fulfill the purchase. When customers are required

to enter too many details, they are more likely to abandon the process. This is even more likely to happen if they're accessing the site from a mobile device, as it's hard to type lots of details on a mobile phone and most people won't bother.

Ensure your checkout is optimized for mobile, meaning that it's easy to read on smaller mobile screens, and ensure that the mobile keyboard changes to the email keypad for the email-address field, and the number keypad if you are asking for their phone number. You can get your website developer to modify the keypad based on what you are asking for, numbers or emails.

Payment gateway. This is the name given to the third-party integration with your website that allows visitors to enter the payment details and pay for whatever they are purchasing. It is essential to know your customers' preferred payment type and allow them to pay as they choose. For example, credit card, debit card, PayPal, bank transfer, etc. For international sales, it's important to give customers the option to pay in their preferred currency. In relation to devices, ensure your payment gateway is optimized for mobile keypads. In other words, it should show the number keypad for the credit card number, date, and CVV. Many payment gateways have built keypad changes into the functionality, but it's always worth testing just in case.

Let's take a look now at some of the main supporting pages on a website that help build your brand experience and drive positive affinity from website visitors. A blog can be an excellent addition to your website. It is a regularly updated magazine-style area that provides visitors with you or your company's opinions and insights on any subject related to your core business or sector. Use your blog to provide useful information to allow your customers to understand your brand and help them make up their mind to choose you as the solution to their needs.

Blogs allow you to show thought leadership. And when you look at the questions people are searching for on Google about your product or industry, you can write content for your website that answers these questions. This positions your product as a solution to their needs. This is the essence of search-engine optimization, SEO. You do keyword research to discover what people are looking for, you created the content they are searching for on your website, and you show up as the solution to their needs.

Once you have a blog, it needs to be updated fairly regularly and you might even outsource the writing task. Your blog should be closely aligned with your social-media strategy and you can consider also linking to other blogs to help your reputation and guest blog on other sites and invite others to write guest blog posts on yours.

A news section is useful for keeping people up to date with developments in your company. Use this section to show how dynamic your company is by listing any press releases, news stories, or general news. But don't add a news section if you don't really generate a lot of news. You will struggle to keep it updated and website visitors will not be interested in old or uninteresting news stories.

An FAQ section is where site visitors will go to find answers to their frequently asked questions about your business, products, or services. To create the information, you anticipate what people will want to find here. Look at the common queries that pop up from people engaging with you in your social media feeds, like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter, as well as their contact requests and issues raised in online chat. You should already be proactively responding to these information requests in these channels, and you can use those answers to create the website FAQs. Write the FAQs in such a way that will help customers decide they want to engage further with your company and purchase.

Just a note. It can be a good idea to use your FAQs to deal with common objections. An objection is a reason or excuse that someone uses not to buy from you, such as, "I don't have time," "I don't have the budget," or, "I'm happy with my current supplier." If you have a sales team, ask them for insights into common objections as inspiration for content for your FAQ page. When you proactively deal with objections in your FAQs, like "Why our prices seem higher than our competitors," you give space to the visitor to explore your answers in their own time, which can help them make up their mind rather than brushing you off entirely.

Testimonials are third-party reviews from your customers, praising your products or services or just the experience of dealing with your company. This is a very powerful way to drive positive referrals from your customers. People are far more likely to believe the opinion of other customers, even strangers, than what the company says about themselves. Try to gather as many positive reviews from your existing customers as you can through asking them in post-purchase surveys or customer service. And this will help encourage other people to become customers of your business.

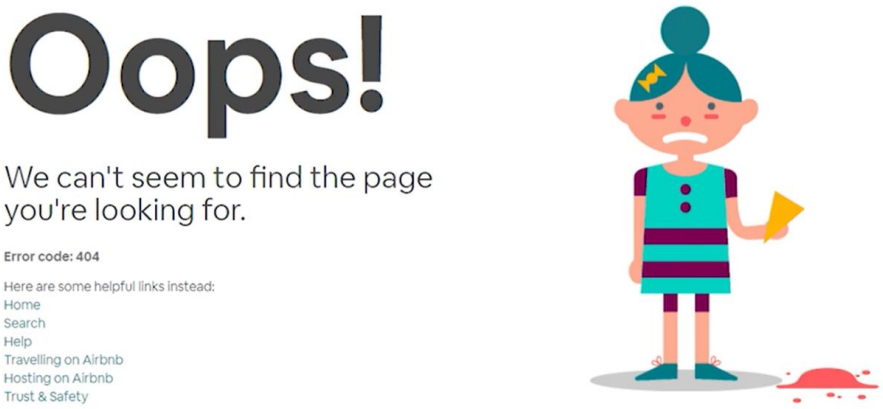
Your cookie and privacy policy is essential for letting visitors know how you handle their data. Follow the guidelines in your location you have your business, and keep in mind international visitors and customers by paying attention to GDPR and other international privacy directives.

Every website must have a terms and conditions which lets visitors know the details of your sales contract and the returns or refund policy. These are standard pages to comply with consumer protection and data-protection legislation, locally and globally. It's important that these are included to build trust and to show how you comply with the regulations.

The thank-you and purchase-confirmation pages tell users that a web form or contact form has been successfully submitted. Likewise, if they have bought something on an e-commerce site, a confirmation page tells them that their payment has been successful and their order received. These are massively valuable pages to reassure customers that everything is working as expected. They are also useful for marketing purposes, as the user trusts your organization to some degree. That is, they have just given you their contact details for lead generation or their credit-card details and paid for e-commerce. This means you now have the opportunity to build on that trust and engage with them further by giving them access to new content or directing them towards interesting or relevant pages on your website. This keeps them positively engaged with your brand as you continue to help them beyond the lead submission or purchase. This can have a long-lasting effect on customer perceptions about your brand or the organization.

Every website has a standard error page called the "404, page not found." This is a page that displays a page-not-found message when the page a visitor was looking for can't be found or there is a bad link. Marketers often overlook this page, but there's an opportunity here to engage with your visitors in a light-hearted or interesting way. When done well, it can help them understand a little bit more about your brand personality, which can lead to better affinity and positive feelings towards your company. If nothing else, you can use this page to suggest high-performing pages the average visitor may be interested in.

Here's a nice example from Airbnb.



CONVERSION RATE OPTIMIZATION

When marketers talk about improving a website's ability to drive conversions, such as bringing in leads, sign-ups, or e-commerce sales, this is what's called conversion rate optimization, or CRO.

The primary goal of CRO is to create and optimize the conditions on a website to drive more sales, leads, or conversions using a number of specific tactics on the site itself.

Let's look at what these tactics might be. In terms of an e-commerce website, here are some of the on-site tactics that can improve the site's performance.

Sales promotions. Enticing offers at key locations on the website.

Merchandising. Placing priority products in specific locations on the homepage or category pages.

Cart abandonment emails sent to those who did not complete their purchase and asking them to explain why they chose to leave.

Coupons and discount codes.

Free shipping for certain locations or limited windows of time.

Product filters to show specific types of products or content. For example, only show dresses on an e-commerce site, only show enterprise-level solutions for B2B organizations, or only show PPC posts on a digital marketing blog.

Trust signals such as Verified by Visa and secure checkout notifications.

Guest checkout where the visitor does not need to register before purchasing.

Progress bars in checkout, a simple UX fix to show them where they're at in the process. Features that show during the browsing process that indicate what others are buying or two people are also looking at this product.

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Lead generation sites have specific tactics to help with conversion rate optimization, where you could offer different lead magnets for different customer personas or B2B buyer types.

Simple forms to encourage initial contact from visitors who have to input less information.

Automated email. Have multiple web forms and conversion points throughout the website that are enticing to visitors to want to click.

Finally, there are some CRO tactics that can improve the performance of all three types of websites, portfolio, lead generation, and e-commerce. These are clear compelling site content, compelling offers that beat the competitors, easy to understand CTAs, a well-designed user experience that makes it easy to navigate the site, FAQs that answer typical questions and are kept updated, live chat, retargeting to allow you to reengage past site visitors.

Page speed. You can test your site's speed on mobile and desktop with the Google sites speed test.

Secure HTTPS websites. A site search that provides quality search results for visitors looking for specific things on your site.

Customer reviews and testimonials as well as real data to prove how your products or services will help someone according to their need.

HOW TO DESIGN A WEBSITE

There are four key components to any effective website design. These are:

1. Information Architecture, which is the framework of a website.
2. Design, or the look-and-feel of the website layout, fonts, and colors
3. Content, which is all the text, videos, and images on the site that users will engage with.
4. Optimization, the ongoing adaptation of the website to increase conversions, user engagement, and remove friction or obstacles.

We'll take a closer look at each of these four elements in turn.

Information Architecture (IA) covers the page structure, navigation levels, user pathways, and page URLs of the site. This is how you start to map it out:

1. Use an Excel table to map out and plan the pages and URL structure of your website
2. Group the different themes and types of content into categories
3. Make sure the structure of your URLs is simple and short
4. Use your IA to determine site navigation and wireframe design

Ideally, you would plan and decide on the structure of your product pages and URLs before you build a website so that you can manage the content as efficiently as possible. Let's look at a sample IA and URL structure and see how it drills down from the top level to an individual product page:

Homepage: www.yourwebsite.com/

All Products page: (+products) www.yourwebsite.com/products

Watches Category Page: (+products+product category) www.yourwebsite.com/products/watches

Michael Kors Watches: (+products+category+brand)
www.yourwebsite.com/products/watches/michael-kors

Michael Kors Ladies Rose Gold Watch: (+products+category+brand+product name)
www.yourwebsite.com/products/watches/michael-kors/ladies-rose-gold-parker-chronograph-watch

Michael Kors Mens Gold Watch: (+products+category+brand+product name)
www.yourwebsite.com/products/watches/michael-kors/mens-gold-lexington-chronograph-watch

Design is what a website looks like, and the better quality the design, the more likely someone will want to engage with it. You can plan a simple website yourself or work with a web designer to plan and design your website. Here are some of the tasks a web designer should do to in the initial phase of a website project:

1. Create a prototype of the website that shows the structure and layout but doesn't need to include graphical elements. This is called a wireframe and it uses the IA as a starting point for the structure.
2. Design a “mockup” of the website by adding graphics and colors to the wireframes.
3. Implement changes once approved.

When we talk about content, we mean all the informational elements the visitor can absorb and engage with on your website. This includes all the text, images and videos as well as downloadable files, PDF guides, infographics, blog posts, eBooks, and podcasts. So how do you start planning or improving your site’s content?

1. The first thing to do is look at each page in your information architecture. You can use the wireframe from the website design and fill it in with the website content.
2. Have the text proofread by someone other than the original writer. Look for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes, and also check for comprehension, readability, and content accuracy, as well as where SEO keywords can be used in a natural way.
3. Source images for all pages that will suit the brand, following brand guidelines if you have them.
4. Finally, add all the content to the website once the design has been implemented.

Optimization covers the steps involved in measuring and updating elements of your website to improve the user experience, conversions, and SEO performance. Here’s what you need to do:

1. Include SEO keywords (based on your keyword research) in page title tags, headings and also in the web page content. This way, search engines will be able to find your website.
2. Set up metrics reporting on visitor engagement using website analytics tools like Google Analytics.
3. Try to identify friction points by using conversion funnels and goal tracking.
4. Keep an eye on your data reporting, watching out for traffic spikes, changes in metrics or any other anomalies as any of those may indicate a problem. Or an opportunity.
5. Use real data to drive decisions and inform your website optimization strategy. Test what works and doesn’t work. Keep optimizing.

LESSON 2: DESIGN PRINCIPLES

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DESIGN PRINCIPLES

"Information is only useful when it can be understood," Muriel Cooper, MIT Press.

The aim of any design is to strike the balance between form, looking good, and function, being able to use it.

A well-made website is one where it's clear where the visitor can go and what they'll find, and to enjoy the experience along the way. Think of your website as your calling card, the first impression anyone will have of your company. It needs to look good and provide what people are looking for. This is at the core of website optimization.

Let's identify the principles of web design.

Simplicity. The site design is not distracting and makes it easy to use and understand. Buttons with CTAs are easy to click on.

Easy to navigate. Visitors can get the information or complete the actions they want to easily move from one part of the site to the other.

Consistent information. Page information is updated and feels like part of the same web and brand experience.

Device-friendly. The website is easy to use on different devices. For example, people can access and view the same pages on mobile as they can on desktop. This might require adding a “view as desktop” link at the bottom of pages.

Cohesive design. Colors, layout, typography and design are the same across all areas of the site to help you enjoy the experience. This includes branding, link colors, photo choice and formatting.

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LESSON 3: USER-CENTERED DESIGN AND WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

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UX VERSUS UI

Two very important areas to understand about website design and optimization are UX and UI. What do these terms mean and what's the difference between them?

Well, UX, user experience, is concerned with the person's feelings, perceptions, and responses resulting from their use or anticipated use of a website. In simpler terms, it's how someone feels when they interact with your website, from clicking on a page to filling out a form.

User interface or UI is the website itself, the site elements like clickable links, forms, navigations, CTAs, etc. When a person uses a website, the UI, they have a reaction, and this is the personal experience, UX.

Websites can elicit feelings of delight, frustration, happiness, annoyance, etc. Therefore, we ideally want to create a website UI that evokes a positive user experience so our brand or organization reflects positively on the person and encourages them to engage with us.

So the main difference is UI is the medium and UX is the experience. While UX deals with interaction design, that is, anything that someone is going to watch or read or click on, UI is going to be the medium through which they do that. It would be the player for the video they're going to watch, the infographics that are displayed and how those are displayed, that all goes into UI.

In terms of building a better UX, you want to make sure that you carefully design your IA and wireframes so the website is functionable and usable even without design elements like graphics or content. And then, once you've mapped out a usable website structure on your wireframes to optimize UX, we can move on to the design piece and UI.

UI is all about the design and content of a site, what it looks like in terms of colors, elements, typography, and how the content is laid out.

UX AND UI PRINCIPLES

Good UX and UI design are important to website optimization; because when you ensure both are of a high quality, they contribute to the success of the website – one that gives users the information they need, when they need it and also drives towards business objectives.

When the UX and UI are successfully combined on a website, these are the principles that will shine through:

- **Accessibility:** the website is easy for any user to use, including those with vision or mobility issues.
- **Clarity:** The website is easy to understand – it has a clear purpose.
- **Learnability:** The website provides valuable information that answers the user's query or need.
- **Credibility:** The website uses reliable information from reputable sources to prove its point or educate the user.
- **Relevancy:** The website layout and content are kept up-to-date, using best practices.

It's important to emphasize how important proper website navigation is for the user experience. A well-designed site that has easy-to-find content and actions will help you:

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- Get more clicks and traffic to inner pages on the website
- Increase the amount of time people spend on the site and lower the bounce rate because can easily find what they're looking for
- Make it easier for search engines to crawl the site for better indexing. This leads to better visibility in search results and SEO.

It's also important to consider UX in terms of the responsive design of a website, meaning a site that will operate seamlessly across desktop, mobile, and tablet devices. A fully responsive design will mean you have a chance of higher conversions and sales due to an overall positive site experience for site visitors regardless of the device they use.

In particular, it will help with:

- Creating a positive affinity towards your brand
- Getting higher preference in search results
- Creating a good design experience across devices
- Catering for more visitors
- Updating and maintaining the website as you only have one website for all devices rather than different websites for mobile and for desktop.

You can use the Google Mobile Friendly Testing tool to see how well your site works on mobile.

Let's dig a little deeper into issues around responsive design and consider users who might be accessing your site from any device.

- When someone accesses your site via their mobile phone, they will have different expectations or needs to when they see it from their desktop. They might be on the go and need some information fast, and not have the time (or patience) to browse through many pages to find what they need.
- Think about where you put different types of information on the site, like contact information, reviews, services, and CTAs. You can do A/B testing across different devices to see what type of placement gets more, or better, clicks.
- User interface expectations will vary: on a mobile device you need call links for the phone number and the number formatting for fields that ask for phone number or specific number. This makes the mobile site easier to use and if it's easier than the site experience is better.

Websites that are not easy to navigate and read on mobile devices may not be shown to users in mobile search results. Since the internet is now accessed more on mobile phones than desktop computers, Google has moved to the mobile-first index it announced years previously. This index prefers websites that are optimized for mobile-first, and has led to a greater push for designers, developers, and SEOs to create responsive websites that are easy to use on any device.

There are two basic website design approaches in terms of a mobile-first design: mobile-friendly and responsive website design.

A **mobile-friendly website** is a different version of your website that's shown to mobile users. It is hosted on a subdomain of your site.

A **responsive website** design is formatted to its ideal fit for the screen it's on. It's important to note that most of the WordPress themes are responsive. If they're responsive themes, that means that it's all one version of your site and it just automatically adjusts to fit the screen that the user is accessing the website from.

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Responsive design is what most websites are now moving towards because it's easier to maintain and serves multiple devices. There has been a degree of controversy and questions raised within the SEO community regarding whether mobile versions of websites are indexed in the same way as regular versions. Google says they are, but it's better just to play it safe and go with a responsive website.

This means that it's ever more important that you think about how easy your website is to use on mobile and not just on desktop. This applies not just to the design of your site, but also the amount of content in, say, your blog, or the speed it takes to load key pages.

SEO and website optimization can work closely together in creating an effective mobile-first experience, through the use of responsive design, CTAs, and content.

With the help of a web developer, you can ensure that your CTAs are focused on mobile and desktop users differently. For example, if you're looking to book a restaurant while on your phone, you're more likely to want to look at reviews, maps, and phone numbers on the website because you're on the go and you want to make a decision right away.

On the other hand, if you're using a desktop, you might want to look at reservations or menus. Web developers can alter CTAs depending on the device the person uses so you can give them a better experience based on their needs.

Content is another area in which website optimization and SEO work well together. When you're thinking about how to display the content, think about what your target audience is going to be looking for on their phone and make sure that that information is at the top and easy to access. For instance, if a person is on their phone, they might want to see the call button first, whereas on the desktop version of a site they might prefer a blog post or other information first. These are some of the different expectations people have when using different devices.

IMPROVE UX

Let's talk in some more detail about improving the user experience. As we've discussed, good site structure and navigation will help you get more clicks and traffic to subpages. When a user can easily find what they're looking for, they're going to spend more time browsing the site. They might also find pages they didn't even know existed or think are worth looking at.

A proper navigation also increases time spent on the site and decreases your bounce rate. Users are going to interact more with your site, they're going to click through to more pages and spend more time on each page. This all ties back into not only the content but also how a website is structured beneath its navigation.

It will also be easier for search engine spiders to crawl your site. If your navigation includes all your pages and they have clearly planned URLs, you're providing search engine crawlers with a list of all the pages on your site. The more pages they crawl, the more pages they're likely to index and then show in the search results. This leads to better visibility in search results, and you're being shown as a result in more user searches.

As we've also seen, if your website is responsive or mobile-friendly, it is going to be given preference in search results versus websites that aren't. That's a big differentiator in terms of your competitors,

especially if they don't have that advantage. User expectations and intent differ across different devices and audiences. Thus, you should shape your CTAs and user experience accordingly.

When you're selecting the right call to action for your audience, you want to think about testing to see what works. For example, "Call us today to get an appointment" with the link to call directly on mobile would likely get more clicks on a mobile than a similar link on desktop. You never know what works until you test it and then align the user experience to your specific audience.

You might think about the personas that you have created for your marketing to your audiences and make sure that you are tailoring your CTA to what they would want and need. For example, an older audience would likely appreciate larger font sizes and bigger headers with fewer animations, since they tend to read more slowly. Conversely, a tech-savvy crowd would expect more innovative and forward-thinking web design, such as interactive elements, quizzes, games, and so on.

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LESSON 4: WEBSITE METRICS AND DEVELOPING INSIGHT

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WEBSITE METRICS

A fundamental part of optimizing your website is to identify the most important metrics for you to track. Here are the key metrics you should track and explanation of what they are.

Users, the number of unique visitors to your site.

Pages per session, the average number of pages a user visits on the site.

Average time on site, the average length of time a visitor spends on your website.

Bounce rate, the percentage of visitors who leave after only looking at one page.

Visitor behavior, the total number of new visitors versus returning visitors.

Goals completed, these include purchases, leads, newsletter signups, and so on.

Conversion rate, the percentage of visitors who complete a goal set by you on your website.

Transactions and revenue, the e-commerce sales and revenue generated on your website.

Cart abandonment rate, the percentage of people who start the checkout process but don't complete it.

EVALUATE A WEBSITE

How do you know if your website is effective and meeting your goals? There are a lot of questions you can ask and answer with your data.

- You can use website analytics tools to evaluate whether the site is hitting its metric goals of, for example, ecommerce transactions, generation of leads or general content engagement
- Ask a colleague or friend to go on the site and try to accurately complete a task, like filling out a form, purchasing something or navigating to find a specific page. Do they get confused, is it easy to use, what other honest feedback do they have for you?
- You should test regularly to check if the website is viewable and accessible from a variety of different devices, including iOS and Android phones, tablet devices, and different computers (Mac and PC)
- Finally, it might seem obvious, but check again to make sure all the essential information and core pages are included on the site. Ask yourself some obvious questions and make sure they are answered in the FAQs.

WALKTHROUGH: HOTJAR HEATMAPS

When we sign up for Hotjar, we just need to link it to our website, and we can do this with this code up here. So, we have this Hotjar tracking code, which we can add to the head of our page or if we're using something like Google Tag Manager, we can just add this Site ID to our Google Tag Manager, and then that will link our website to Hotjar.

We can verify the installation by entering our URL and verifying installation. And then, it will say, "Hotjar installation verified." So, let's go ahead and create a heatmap for my site. So, I'll just go to

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Heatmaps, and then New Heatmap. So, now it asks me what I want to call my heatmap, and I'll just call it something like Homepage.

And then, Number of Pageviews. So, this is my basic version where I got this and that's part of my plan. Then I'm targeting A specific page. I'll just put in my homepage here. And create that heatmap. So, now I'm back in Hotjar and we're going to look at that heatmap I created a few days ago.

So, we're just going to go up to Heatmaps, and then when this loads up, we can see our Homepage heatmap in there. So, what I'm going to do now is just view that heatmap, see what it looks like. When it loads up, I can see at the start, my click areas. So, the places where people are clicking on my website. Obviously, the red means that there's more clicks and the blue means that there are fewer clicks, but at least there are clicks.

I'm able to toggle between tablet and indeed mobile, so I can see where people are tapping on these devices. I can look at Scroll. I can look at Move. There're different aspects of my heatmap that I can see, where are people moving, where are people scrolling and all of that stuff, so we can toggle in the area up the top just to see where are people engaging.

So, red obviously means that there's a lot of people seeing it and as it gets cooler, as you scroll down, you're able to see where are points of my heatmap, where are points of my homepage or whatever page we're testing, that people are viewing, that people are missing. So, if we have important information in places where people typically don't scroll through, they'll miss it.

So, we're able to toggle between mobile and tablet, of course, and on a mobile device, we can see where our average fold is, where people are scrolling to. And when we kind of hover our mouse over the section of the screen, we can see what percentage of people are scrolling to that point. That gives us a good understanding of engagement on different pages from the very top down to the very bottom.

We can also look at recordings, recordings of how people use the site. So, it's all anonymized so it's GDPR compliant. And when we click in, we can see a recording of someone using our site. We can kind of see what are people doing and we can scroll along with scroll along and see where they're clicking, where their mouse moves, what they're doing.

It gives us a good idea of the engagement levels on our site. So, we're able to look at both heatmaps and indeed recordings to understand how people are engaging with our site.

MONITOR AND REPORT

Once you have your tracking in place, you need to do regular reporting to make sure your website continues to be optimized.

Some of the best and most commonly used resources to monitor and report your sites performance includes Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Adobe Analytics, Hotjar Heatmaps.

A/B TESTING

A/B testing is when you compare two different versions of a website element to determine which one drives more clicks, conversions, and engagement from users. Anything that a user is seeing can be A/B tested, from colors to images, CTAs to contact forms. Think about what could impact their experience and then do a test on it.

For example, you could test to see if a blue CTA works better than a green CTA. Or test if the wording "Get 50% Off" works better than "Get $50 off all items over $100".

Many different website elements can be A/B tested, such as:

- Calls-to-action (CTAs)
- Headlines
- Graphics, images, and banners
- Wording of content on landing pages
- Types of promotion or offer

When you are ready to test elements of your website, it is important to be aware of the steps and best practices for A/B testing:

1. Pick one element on your page to test, like the page layout, or a campaign offer.
2. Choose the specific metric you will use to determine success, for example “to increase conversions by 5%”
3. Set a time limit for the test, for example, 3 weeks
4. Set up your original page and your test page in your A/B testing tool
5. Split your sample groups equally and randomly. You must have the same sample size in order to test properly.
6. Determine your sample size. This will be done for you in the tool, you can choose to test your new page on 50% of your site visitors, or select a percentage of total traffic. The key is to ensure the sample size isn’t too small.

Note: It’s important to only test one element at a time. A/B testing can be ineffective if too many tests are running at once: running more than one A/B test on a website doesn’t give you a clear picture of what actually worked. For example, what if you tested both the promotional offer and the headline of the landing page at the same time, and you got a higher conversion rate? You don’t actually know if it was the headline or the promotional offer that caused the higher conversion rate.

There are many tools and plugins you can use for A/B testing. Some of the most popular ones are:

- Google Optimize (which is free)
- AB Tasty
- Optimizely
- HubSpot
- Crazy Egg
- VWO AB Testing

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WALKTHROUGH: A/B TESTING WITH GOOGLE OPTIMIZE

If you want to A/B test aspects of a website, we can use a free tool called Google Optimize. So, you can sign up at optimize.google.com and that will bring you to this optimize area where you can set up some A/B testing for your website.

So, an A/B test in Google Optimize is called an experience, so let's go ahead and create an A/B test or experience. So, the first thing we need to do is link Google Optimize to our website. We can do this from the settings area. We can look at the Optimize snippet and we need to include this in the head tag of our website, or we can link Google Optimize with this ID in Google Tag Manager.

We need to link our Google Analytics to Google Optimize. And we can do that simply by choosing which Analytics we have access to. I can choose here. So, on this instance, I'm choosing my own website and which view of my own websites, the All Web Site View, and that's what's linked. So, my Google Analytics is linked to my Google Optimize, and my Google Optimize is linked to my website.

The next thing I need to do is ensure that I have the Google Optimize Chrome extension. So, this is the Google Optimize Chrome extension here. So, you just do a Google search for Google Optimize Chrome extension and add that to your Google Chrome, and that will allow you to run Google Optimize, so make sure you have your Google Optimize Chrome extension in there too.

So, let's go ahead and create our first test. We have A/B test, Multivariate, Redirect, Personalization, or Banner. Let's go with an A/B test and we'll call it something like Button Test, because we're going to test one aspect of our website and it's going to be an A/B test. And then, I'm going to enter my URL, so it'll be my contact page. So, the button on my contact page, I'm A/B testing that, I create that experience.

Now, I need to add a variant, meeting a different variation of my website. So, I click Add variant. This is the different version of my page. You can call it something like Button Color. And Done. And then, 50% is going to go to my Original page, and 50% of traffic is going to go to my Button Color page. So, let's edit that Button Color.

So, I press Edit. And then, I can go down to, this is my contact page, I go down and click this button, and then maybe go to here. And we'll change this to red. So, we'll just change this button to red, and then we'll press Save.

And that's my variant. If there's other aspects you want to change, like your messaging here, you can edit this to say... Or edit this. So, we can change different aspects.

Now, I just want to change one aspect, so that's what I'm going to do here. So as we can see, we've got one change which is my Button Color, and versus my original. And I'm able to go ahead and do that. So, we've just got one change there. This is the URL it's tracking against.

This is my Google Analytics measurement. And my Primary Objective, my objective will relate to my goals. So, the goals that I've set up. So, I've set up a goal in my Google Analytics called Contact Form Submissions. I want to see, are there more contact form submissions from that new Button Color. And then, when I'm happy, I can go ahead and start this test.

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BUILD A BASIC WEBSITE

At this point we should look at how you would go about building and maintaining a very simple website. If you think about it, a website is basically a collection of content that users can click around. Remember, a website is a collection of words, images and videos which we can browse through and click on, and maybe some areas where you can enter your contact details or credit card information to buy.

So how do you get all the content on your site and put it together? You need a tool called a content management system or CMS. It's basically the back end of a website where you add and update all images and text and other elements.

Complex websites will require the specialist skills of a web designer, but it is possible to create a simple website using some of the more common content management systems

Some commonly used Content Management Systems include

- WordPress
- Shopify
- Wix
- Joomla
- Squarespace
- Drupal
- ExpressionEngine
- Magento

While all of these options will work for a portfolio site, Magento works especially well for enterprise level and large-scale eCommerce. The most popular CMS for an eCommerce site is Shopify, though Wix and Squarespace can also accommodate ecommerce functionality. WordPress is excellent for all kinds of website builds, lead gen, bloggers, and content-focused sites.

Typical steps for building a simple website:

1. Choose a hosting provider, CMS, and domain name
2. Install CMS and website plugins
3. Format website plugins and design theme
4. Add website tracking and analytics
5. Add pages and content, for example, text, graphics, and SEO metadata
6. Test
7. Launch
8. Monitor for bugs as needed

First, you will need to choose and purchase your domain name and then choose a hosting provider. There are plenty of options out there. The top ones include HostGator, Bluehost, and GoDaddy.

Next, you need to choose what Content Management System you are going to use. Once you have your CMS installed you can access the back-end of your site and then decide on the website theme, and choose different plugins. The website theme is the overarching design and structure of the site. There are thousands of plugins, both free and paid, that you can use for almost anything you could imagine. That can be SEO, image effects, social sharing for social media, and so on.

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You will also need to format the plugins, along with the design theme of your site, to make sure it all looks right before launching. This includes branding, colors, logo, and graphics, for example.

The next step is to add website tracking and analytics.

There are a number of different ways you can add tracking to your website to measure success.

1. You can “hard-code” tracking tags directly into the website HTML – this might require the help of a web developer for each tag
2. Or you can use Tag Management software to do it remotely – this is an easier and more efficient option

Then, you'll add the content – this includes the text, graphics, videos, and SEO metadata that will be entered into the pages, and then you also tweak any settings as necessary.

The next step is to test your website before going ‘live’.

Once you have completed website testing, your website is ready for launch.

When your website is live, be sure to monitor it regularly for bugs and errors and update it as necessary.

WALKTHROUGH: WEBSITE HOSTING AND SETTING UP ON WORDPRESS

To start building a website, we can go to any kind of domain provider or hosting provider like GoDaddy, or LetsHost, or Black Knight or whoever it is in your local market.

So, we've just gone to GoDaddy, so we've got our manage WordPress thing here, and this will, already installed in our hosting plan. So, we can go with basic or ultimate, and we've got our monthly costs there. So, depending on what we want, we can maybe go with the ultimate one because we have that SSL, that secure cert, and then we can choose how long it's going to be.

So then, we are at our purchase stage here, and we can modify any of our things and go ahead and pay. And then, we have the ability to create a WordPress site on our hosting. So, this is the WordPress login area. It's yourwebsite/wp-admin, and then you can log in here. So, I'll just log in.

So, in the back end of WordPress, I can do a number of things like I can change the Appearance of my website and modify the Themes. So, in the Themes area, I can add add a new theme. And from here, I'm just able to go down and see is there anything that kind of captures my imagination, or I can look at Popular themes, or Latest themes, favorite themes, and decide is there anything that I think, "Yep, this would look nice as my website."

This is the pre-defined template that you choose for your website. So, maybe we'll Install this, and we can go ahead and fill in the blanks here. So, that's our first point. We can also do things like add plugins. So, plugins enhance the functionality of our website. So, over in the left-hand side, we can choose Plugins, and add a new plugin.

So, we've got all these different types of plugins. So, we can search a plugin maybe for SEO. We'll do a plugin for SEO, and the top plugin for SEO will be the Yoast SEO plugin, which we can install to our website and that will enhance our SEO. Or whatever it is we want.

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We might do e-commerce, but we can add our plugins in here just to enhance the functionality of our website. When we've added our plugins and modified our appearance, we can start doing things like publishing content and pages, so let's go to Pages. And I have some existing pages on this site, like my about page, my Blog page, Clients, Contact, my front page, digital training page and a Privacy Policy.

But, if I want to add a new page, I simply press the Add New button, and we can call this the Products Page. And we can start writing about our product, so product and then we can... It's all done off of what's called blocks. So, we can create a new block, say, below. So, afterwards...

And we have this new block area, and then we press this Plus button, and we can look at all of the different content types that we can insert in this block, from Paragraph, to a Heading, a List, Preformatted, we could put in an Image or a Gallery, which is a number of images, Audio, and File, a Video.

We can design it with Buttons, Columns, Group, separators, we can put in Widgets like Shortcode, we can put in Custom HTML. Embeds, embedding different things like that in here, so there's loads of different content types that can go into the different sections of your page or indeed your posts.

And when you're happy with that... So say we decide to put in an image, and we can look at my Media Library or Upload, so maybe we'll go to the Media Library and insert this image here. And there's an image of me. And I can just go ahead and write whatever I want about this, and then Publish this as a page.

WALKTHROUGH: SETTING UP GOOGLE TAG MANAGER

So, when you set up your Google Tag Manager account, you just enter in your details. So, it might be something like this, what your location is. So, wherever your location is. And we can share the data anonymously with others if we're happy enough to do this.

Something like this. And is it for Web, IOS, Android, AMP or Server. So, let's go with Web and then we Create. And we have to accept the data processing agreement. And...now we're asked to install this tag on our website, and we can remotely insert tags to our website via Google Tag Manager.

If you're using WordPress, we can use a plugin to do this, so let's just go ahead and copy my ID. So, I'll copy my Google Tag Manager ID and then I can go to WordPress. Back in WordPress, we have the option to add a Google Tag Manager plugin. So, we go to Plugins and we can add a new plugin and search for the Google Tag Manager plugin.

So, I have Google Tag Manager for WordPress, and in my Settings area I just enter my tracking code and I save the changes. And it will just choose the default option and that allows you to insert whatever tag you want onto your website. So, if we want to insert a tag, we simply go to the Tags area, and then we can go, if I want to enter a new tag.

So, what tag do I want to add to my website? So, maybe I'm setting up Google Analytics for the first time and I go to Tag Configuration and I choose Google Analytics. And then, what am I tracking? I'm tracking people looking at my website, page views. And then, I have to choose my Analytics code. So, we're all presented with an Analytics code when we sign up to Google Analytics.

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So, we can go New Variable and it's Google Analytics Tracking ID, and it'll be something like UA- whatever our Google Analytics tracking code is in here. Our Google Analytics Page Views with our tracking ID, so we need to choose a trigger for when this might show.

So, we click in here and we say show Google Analytics on all pages. So, Google Analytics with my tracking ID is going to fire on all pages the website. I save this, and then when I'm ready, I just go ahead and I push this live to my website by pressing Submit. If we want to add our Facebook pixel, we can go to New, and we can go to Tag Configuration, and something like Custom HTML.

And we just paste our Facebook pixel that we got from our Facebook Business Manager into here, call it something like Facebook Pixel. And when do we want this to fire? We want this to fire again, on every page. And we go ahead and can save this.

We just go to New, and then we have a number of predefined tags. So, we've got Google, Google Optimize, Google Ads, we've got Cookiebot which I've added myself, AdRoll, there's a number of different automated tags that we...we got our LinkedIn tag, our Hotjar tag, we've got Marin, we've got Bing.

We've got all of these different tags that we're able to add, Twitter, add to Google Tag Manager. And that allows us to push these tags remotely onto our website. And when we're ready, we just press Submit and then we publish these changes.

And when we publish these changes, all of this detail will be pushed onto my website. So, I was able to add all the tracking without the need of a developer or indeed messing around with the HTML.

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LESSON 5: AGILE THINKING

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INTRODUCTION TO AGILE THINKING

The concept of agile thinking has become popular across the business world. In this topic, we explore what is meant by agile thinking, and how it originated.

Agile thinking is based on the agile methodology. It was drawn up by a group of software developers on a trip to Utah in 2001. These developers formed the Agile Alliance in a bid to overhaul the process by which software was created and deployed. It has become the dominant methodology for software development. But, although it originated in the software arena, with the booming influence of the tech industry on wider business, it has informed most other industries too.

But what exactly is agile thinking? Well, when we talk about 'agile thinking', we're mostly referring to the idea of responding to change over following a plan. In other words, we should respond to change as we progress with a project, and not be rigidly fixed to a plan, regardless of what happens along the way. After all, being agile means being flexible and quick to adapt to change. This agility enables organizations to respond effectively to unexpected events.

The Agile Alliance developed a historic manifesto that outlines twelve principles for applying agile thinking. Five of these principles are particularly relevant for marketers.

One principle states that you should break big work down into smaller tasks that can be completed quickly.

People struggle to stay motivated in long projects. This is because they generally need to feel a regular sense of achievement and completion. These small milestones and achievements along the way keep the team motivated. If something takes longer than a few days, it can feel like it drags on. Then people start to lose focus because they are not getting a regular achievement boost. Additionally, there is a long-proven benefit to focusing large resources on small problems one by one. Indeed, this goes all the way back to Sun Tzu's 5th century BC book The Art of War.

Another principle is that you need to recognize that the best work emerges from self-organized teams.

Increasingly today, people are becoming more generalist, and are developing hard-to-categorize sets of skills. People don't always fit neatly into skill set 'pigeon holes'. And the individual is usually best placed to identify how his or her skills can best be deployed. In any group of people, you're going to have a rich range of skills. When you challenge a group with a problem, or a project to be completed, they can best decide who does what. This is because people will naturally gravitate to what they do best. This in turns gives team members a sense of agency and empowerment, which, of course, raises motivation and morale. And the advantage for the project is that this allows skills and problems to be best matched up.

A third principle relevant to marketers is that you should assemble the project team and business owners on a daily basis throughout the project.

Nobody likes long, meandering meetings. But meetings can be short and snappy. Agile meetings deliver quick wins. Now known in software and web development as daily 'stand-ups' or 'huddles', these quick-fire update meetings allow everyone to stay in touch with the moving parts of a project. This also prevents issues festering in the dark.

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All project-based teams, regardless of discipline or industry, could benefit from this approach to team communication. It clarifies what the day ahead requires of everyone, and empowers each team member to raise important issues. It also gives everyone a sense of focus for the day. And it allows people to share daily accomplishments and learnings.

No team is perfect, and a project is always a learning process. So another useful principle from agile thinking is that you should have the team reflect at regular intervals on how to become more effective, and then tune and adjust behavior accordingly.

Continuous improvement is the name of the game here. Probably the most well-known principle of agile, this tactic of changing course as you progress through a project allows teams to respond to factors which might affect the ultimate success of the finished product. If something clearly isn't working, the team responds quickly to come up with a better approach. This could apply to a specific piece of content, or even the campaign as a whole.

One final agile thinking principle relevant to marketing is that you should harness change for a competitive advantage.

Following on from the previous principle, an agile approach to delivering projects is far more than merely a coping or mitigating mechanism. Your response to change can prove to be a competitive advantage in the marketplace. It can lead to more relevant and effective marketing too. Responding to a changing environment more quickly than your competitors do will enable you to better position yourself in the market.

USING THE 'TEST AND LEARN' APPROACH

In this topic, you will learn how agile is applied to marketing, in a broad sense, and how we must adapt to this new environment of constant change and uncertainty. We will also explore how this lack of stability is in fact a series of valuable opportunities.

Change and uncertainty are feared by most humans, indeed most animals. Uncertainty is the realm of the unknown, and we often perceive this as a risk to our safety and our lives. It triggers our 'fight or flight' response, which in turn increases our stress levels. So we humans tend to fear change and avoid it whenever possible.

However, the problem is that we now live in a world where the only constant is change! Not only can we not avoid change, we need to embrace it. Nowhere is this change more obvious than in the world of digital marketing. To succeed in this sector, you have to become comfortable with handling constant change.

Today's digital landscape is moving faster than ever before, in fact faster than anyone can keep up with. This is explained in Eddie Obeng's famous 2012 TED talk. He highlights the fact that everything in business today is to some extent new, and so there are no experts who can reliably predict anything anymore. Uncertainty is now the norm.

It is this set of conditions which leaves us in a world in which we must embrace constant change and live with uncertainty. And with uncertainty comes failure. Silicon Valley has recently completely changed it attitude to failure. In fact, the edict that we must 'fail fast, fail often' is plastered on the office walls of the tech giants such as Facebook and Google.

This ethos was popularized in the now-famous 2013 book of the same name by Ryan Babineaux and John Krumboltz of Stanford University, who teach a course on the subject there. The idea is that fear of failure holds people back. Put simply, in order to cope with change, people must be willing to make mistakes and learn from them. Failure becomes a learning process and an opportunity for improvement.

But, let's face it! Failure is very hard to acknowledge. We don't like admitting it to ourselves, to those whom we report to, and even to those whom we manage. It's not easy to stand in front of your team and declare, "We are going to try something new, and I honestly have no idea what's going to happen." But that willingness to 'try something new' is exactly the sort of courage you need to succeed in today's digital landscape. Think about it. Whatever your next digital campaign is, you are going to be, to some extent, unsure about what will happen. This is because digital marketing is susceptible to countless factors that traditional advertising never was. Digital technology is changing all the time and we have to change with it.

The Agile Alliance stresses the fact that this change is actually a potential opportunity for success. Rather than being avoided, change should be eagerly grasped. Sure, you might make mistakes along the way, but at least you'll learn something from the experience. Don't spend days weeping about your failures. Find out as quickly as possible why you failed, and then learn from that and move on.

In software companies, as mentioned previously, this approach is often called 'fail fast, fail often'. In digital marketing, this often gets referred to as a 'test and learn' approach. First, we test. We try something new that we think will work. And then we learn. We use the data fed back to us by our CRM, web, and social platforms in a real-time and constant fashion to adapt our campaign message or creative assets on the fly to respond to this feedback. The key phrase here is 'on the fly'. Being agile means responding to new data as soon as you receive it.

Where this is happening at the greatest scale currently is in social media advertising. A digital marketer such as myself no longer has to be tied to one or a small number of creative routes, targeting one desired audience and hoping for the best.

We can deploy hundreds and even thousands of variants of the same campaign. They can be messaged in all the subtly different ways our marketing team can imagine, with every variation mixed with every other variation to create an exponential number of different creatives. Each one will resonate with human minds and emotions in very slightly different ways. And then this resonance will again be different for each segment of an audience or population as it interacts with their unique psychographic make-up.

Effective marketing actually involves a mass, population-wide experiment. It relies on real-time data which we now have access to through easy-to-use dashboards in advertising products such as Facebook Ads, LinkedIn Ads, and so on. As soon as the first cents are being spent, we can make decisions on what's working, for whom, and what conversions or results are being driven.

Note how agile this approach is. The data arrives in real time. It presents an immediate snapshot of an evolving situation. And with effective dashboards, you can interpret this data as quickly as possible. You always know what's happening, and you can respond as necessary.

This 'test and learn' approach obviously results in a higher return on investment for marketers. However, over time, it also improves marketers' instincts for good creative and how their audience respond to various messages and propositions. If their instincts were wrong the first time, their instincts will be better the next time. Failure has become a learning experience again!

APPLYING THE AGILE CONCEPT OF MVP

Agile thinking has become popular in marketing because it can result in more customer-centric marketing. You're better positioned to respond to customer feedback and changing market demands. This is crucial in today's digital landscape, as content is increasingly about serving the informational and entertainment needs of the reader, listener, or viewer. It is not about simply blasting promotional messages all over the internet.

This is what is broadly known as content marketing, which put simply involves developing different content that will appeal to different customers. It has boomed in popularity in recent years due to its effectiveness in appealing to customers on a deeper level, in ways that traditional marketing never did.

The original idea behind the agile framework was to create a more customer-centric process for delivering software products. In fact, the customer practically became part of the development team. This was largely achieved by creating products with lots of feedback along the way, as the product was still being developed. This is clearly much more effective than simply deploying the finished article and inviting feedback at the end of the journey.

Likewise, in marketing, we can be far more effective if we gather feedback as we create campaigns, and as we run them. The traditional approach has been to sign off a campaign, following a client review, and then deploy it. The problem was that performance data would be gathered only after the campaign has ended.

An important and useful concept to come out of agile thinking is that of the 'MVP' or 'minimum viable product'. It is used to this day in web and software production, with almost every tech product you use having started life as an MVP.

The concept is simply that whatever the idea for something is, it is stripped down repeatedly and ruthlessly until only its essence remains. Only when you have reached the point where any further removing of functionality would fundamentally change the idea or remove its core value to the user do you have a true MVP.

That's great in software development! But how does this apply to marketing? Well, consider this scenario. Once upon a time, a marketing creative team had an idea for a series of brand films to bring to life the story of a brand's heritage for consumers. The team was very excited because this would be a high-production and expensive affair. It would showcase the team's creativity in bright, vibrant colors! However, no one gave too much thought to its likely effectiveness as a piece of content marketing on the web. The team was excited, but would the customers be excited too? A traditionally minded marketer might argue, "Well, that's just the nature of marketing! It's unpredictable and we have to trust our creative instinct. That's why we're the creative team, after all."

But just consider for a moment how much expense, time, and effort would be involved in making this video. Is there a way to test the public appetite for the idea and its themes before investing so heavily?

Enter the agile marketers! They would strip back the idea of the brand's heritage and look at its most essential constituent parts. Suppose they decided to focus on key milestones in their brand journey. Then the team would consider which content formats would allow them to communicate those ideas with the lowest time and financial cost. It doesn't have to be an expensive, flashy video. It could simply be a series of curious factoids on Twitter. For example, "Did you know our company began life

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when a flight to Atlanta was delayed during a thunderstorm?" Or they could use short animated pieces created with an online video tool, such as Biteable, for Instagram. What about a Facebook Live stream? They could have an interesting or entertaining person in the company showing users behind the scenes and explaining how the company is to this day still driven by its heritage. Each of these approaches could be considered as MVP, which could then later be further developed into a more ambitious project.

If the audience is still small for the MVPs, all of this content can be promoted to specific niche audiences to see how they respond. And all the data from these MVP content pieces can be gathered to inform further investment. This doesn't yet have to be the full-blown big idea. But it could be something a little more involved than the MVP as a further round of content tests to confirm the team's thinking. In this way, the marketing team is getting ongoing customer feedback during the creative process!

BENEFITS OF AGILE THINKING

Now you know what agile thinking is and how it can be deployed in the marketing sector. But what exactly are the benefits of agile thinking in marketing? There are, in fact, many!

The first benefit is that agile thinking increases efficiency.

One of the key advantages of agile thinking is that it brings potential problems to the surface quickly. This helps reduce any wasted effort later in the process. Eliminating unnecessary steps and red tape means teams work faster. And this gives them a quicker sense of accomplishment, which is invaluable for team morale.

And consider the advantages for the business. Because your team is more efficient, it is able to deliver more projects. And this means the organization is able to bring in customers. Instead of spending time on things that don't deliver value, you can focus all of your efforts on the most important tasks at hand. Because you're getting ongoing customer feedback, you can be more confident that you're working on projects that will ultimately lead to market success.

The second benefit that that agile thinking increases innovation.

Agile thinking leads to a rapid testing process. So marketing teams that use agile thinking are getting a steady stream of feedback during development. This enables them to discover all kinds of insights much more quickly. That means your marketing efforts can be driven by actual data from ongoing customer feedback. You can then better provide customers the messaging they're actually looking for, rather than making guesses.

Plus, by moving more quickly, acting on data, and embracing a fail-fast mindset, you can more easily produce innovative ideas that actually get implemented and drive results.

A third benefit is that agile thinking delivers more return on investment at less cost.

The old, traditional way of doing marketing was often slow, and measurement was sometimes difficult to quantify. Now, agile processes empower teams to run multiple campaigns at once without reducing effectiveness. With the increasing comprehensiveness of modern analytics, it's easier than ever to demonstrate more measurable return on investment at less cost.

A fourth benefit is that agile thinking drives growth.

Processes that can't scale are processes that can't move you forward. Fortunately, agile is designed with growth in mind. It can help teams maintain efficiency as they expand over time, and as the size of campaigns grows with bigger, more ambitious projects.

Finally, agile thinking keeps you focused on your customers.

Remember, agile thinking is a customer-centric philosophy. This approach to marketing keeps teams focused on delivering what customers and audiences actually want without getting bogged down in unnecessary documentation and meetings.

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